

# Elder Abuse

A resource guide for  
agencies in California  
for the prevention  
of elder abuse



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Dear Friends:

As your state Senator, I strongly support the right of all citizens to be treated with dignity and respect. Many seniors are the victims of elder abuse, which often goes unreported by relatives or caregivers.

This brochure can be a guide in identifying abuse. It also provides important resource information. Local and statewide resources are listed in the back.

Sincerely

Senator William W. Monning  
Seventeenth Senate District

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# Elder Abuse

Statistics uncover a frightening picture of elder abuse in this country. According to the House Select Committee on Aging, one out of every 20 seniors will be a victim of neglect or physical, psychological or financial abuse this year. Unfortunately, only 1 in 14 cases is ever reported.

Seniors represent the fastest growing segment of the population. Those age 85 and older are the fastest growing group. By the year 2030, people over 65 will represent nearly one-fourth of the population.

Whether you are a professional who works with older adults, or a concerned individual, it is critical that you become aware of both the obvious and subtle indicators of abuse.

Because victims are often reluctant to report abuse, a senior's well-being may depend on you to recognize and report suspected abuse.





This booklet is designed to familiarize you with the possible signs of abuse. If you suspect abuse, report it.

## Types of Elder Abuse

There are four general categories of elder abuse:

### **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

including but not limited to:

- Physical assault
- Sexual assault
- Unreasonable physical constraint
- Prolonged deprivation of food or water
- Inappropriate use of a physical or chemical restraint, or psychotropic medication

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE**

- Verbal assaults, threats, or harassment
- Subjecting a person to fear, isolation, or serious emotional distress
- Withholding emotional support
- Confinement

## FINANCIAL ABUSE

- Theft
- Embezzlement
- Misuse of funds or property
- Extortion
- Fraud

## NEGLECT

- Failure to assist in personal hygiene
- Failure to provide clothing and shelter
- Failure to provide medical care
- Failure to protect from health and safety hazards
- Failure to prevent malnutrition
- Abandonment
- Self-neglect

## The Victims

- Most are females age 75 and older.
- They usually live with their abuser.
- They are often reluctant to tell anyone about the abuse because they are ashamed that their adult children or caretaker has mistreated them.
- Victims depend on the abuser for care.
- Victims do not report abuse because they fear the consequences if the person is taken away or possible physical or emotional retaliation.
- They often deny the reported abuse.

## The Abusers

- Most are related to the victim, and are usually adult children or spouses.
- A typical abuser is a member of the victim's family.
- An abuser may have problems such as drug or alcohol abuse.
- The abuser may have emotional or chronic psychiatric problems.
- An abuser may be dependent on the victim financially or emotionally.

## Recognizing Elder Abuse

It is important that seniors, their family members, friends, neighbors and professionals who work with seniors recognize the indicators of elder abuse and report to the appropriate agency.

The following indicators may be signs of elder abuse and neglect. They do not mean abuse has occurred, but they are clues that further investigation is needed.



## PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- Uncombed hair or unshaven
- Poor skin condition or hygiene
- Unkept, dirty
- Patches of hair missing or bleeding below the scalp
- Malnourished or dehydrated
- An untreated medical condition
- Soiled clothing or bed
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Foul smelling
- Cuts, pinch marks, skin tears, lacerations or puncture wounds
- Unexplained bruises or welts
- Burns caused by scalding water, cigarettes, caustics, or ropes
- Injuries that are incompatible with explanations
- Injuries that reflect outline of object used to inflict - electric cord, belt, hand





## BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

- Confused
- Frightened
- Extremely forgetful
- Withdrawn
- Depressed
- Helpless
- Angry
- Disoriented about time and place
- Telling implausible stories
- Hesitant to talk freely

## SOCIAL INDICATORS

- Elder is isolated or lonely with no friends or relatives who drop by.
- Family members or the caregiver isolate the elder, restricting the person's contact with others.
- Elder's interaction or activity within the family is restricted or prohibited.

- Family of the elder is isolated.
- Elder is not given the opportunity to speak for him/herself or see others without the caregiver present.
- Family has a history of violence or drug or alcohol abuse.
- Unemployed adult children with criminal records and emotional problems are living with the elder.

## FINANCIAL INDICATORS

- Unusual activity in bank accounts, such as withdrawal from automatic teller machines when the person cannot walk or get to the bank.
- Signatures on checks and other documents that do not resemble the elder's signature.
- Checks and other documents are signed when the elder cannot write.
- Lack of personal amenities – TV, grooming items, appropriate clothing.
- Pattern of spending changes – the elderly person buys things he or she doesn't need and can't use.
- Numerous unpaid bills and overdue rent – when someone has been designated to pay the bills.
- The elder has been placed in a nursing home or residential care facility that is inconsistent with his or her income or assets. For example, a senior with income of \$5,000 a month is placed in a board and care facility costing only \$1,000 a month.

- The elder is denied necessary placement or services by the person controlling the elder's resources. For example, the elder needs in-home support services but the relative or person controlling the assets won't spend the money.

## CAREGIVER INDICATORS

- Caregiver asks only financial questions, does not ask questions related to care.
- Caregiver has no obvious means of support.
- Level of care needed by the elder is beyond the ability of the caregiver to provide; the caregiver feels overwhelmed.
- Caregiver has the following problems or behavior:
  - Problems with alcohol or drugs
  - Previous history of abuse of others
  - Anger or indifference toward the elder
  - Emotional or psychiatric problems



- Unwilling or reluctant to comply with service providers in planning and executing a plan for the elder's care
- Aggressive toward elder – threats, harassment, insults
- Exhibits concern that too much money is being spent on the care of the elder

## Reporting Elder Abuse

Any person who suspects that abuse has occurred can and should report it.

Abuse often escalates if there is no intervention. Report suspected cases to the appropriate agencies or to law enforcement. They can often intervene before serious injury occurs.

### HOW TO REPORT ELDER ABUSE

If the suspected abuse occurred in a long-term care facility, report it to the local long-term care ombudsman or to the local law enforcement agency. If you need help locating your local long-term care ombudsman, call the California Department of Aging Long-Term Care Ombudsman 24-hour CRISISLINE at 1-800-231-4024.

Reports of abuse occurring anywhere other than a long-term care facility are made to the county adult protective services agency, located in the county department of social services or county welfare department, or to local law enforcement. The identity of reporters is confidential.

## MANDATED REPORTERS

In California, there are mandated reporters who are required by law to report incidents of suspected physical abuse, abandonment, isolation, financial abuse or neglect of any elder or dependent adult. These reporters currently include:

- Elder care custodians (administrators or employees of facilities that provide care for the elderly);
- Health practitioners;
- Designated employees of adult protective services agencies; and
- Designated employees of local law enforcement agencies

California mandated reporters are required by law to report immediately by telephone and within two working days in writing for each incident and each victim of suspected abuse.

California mandated reporters are provided immunity from civil and criminal liability as a result of making a required report. Failure to report is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to six months in the county jail, or a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both.



## Resources

### **Adult Protective Services**

[www.dss.cahwnet.gov](http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov)

Monterey County - 831-883-7565

Santa Cruz County - 831-454-4101

San Luis Obispo County - 805-781-1790

Santa Clara County - 408-755-7690

### **Long-term Care Ombudsman**

[www.aging.ca.gov](http://www.aging.ca.gov)

Monterey County - 831-333-1300/758-4011

Santa Cruz County - 831-429-1913

San Luis Obispo County - 805-785-0132

Santa Clara County - 408-944-0567

### **California Department of Aging**

[www.aging.ca.gov](http://www.aging.ca.gov)

1-800-510-2020 - local information and resources

1-800-231-4024 - 24-hour Long-Term Care Ombudsman CRISISLINE

### **California Attorney General's Bureau of Medi-Cal, Fraud & Elder Abuse**

1-800-722-0432

[www.ag.ca.gov](http://www.ag.ca.gov)

### **California State Senate Subcommittee on Aging and Long-term Care**

[www.sen.ca.gov](http://www.sen.ca.gov)

Information on legislation and access to senior fact sheets on a number of important topics.



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